

CORONA AND RISING OF LAZARUS (Jn 11:1-45)



COVID19 Pandemic seems to kill, not just people, but the economy, the religious practices, education systems, in short the world as we know it. In a microcosmic way, the death of Lazarus made his sisters think of their world collapsing. They were all the more saddened by the fact that Jesus who, they thought, was their good friend who could work miracles, did not bother to turn up, in spite of the sisters sending a message that their brother was mortally sick. (Ref. John 11:1-45).

The church doors are closed now. That made us an un-gathered Church. It is the disciples of Christ that make up the Church, not the buildings, opened or closed. In this time of crisis, with the shut downs, Christians are to re-position themselves to be the true Church. It becomes all the more important for those who are culturally Christian and habitually religious. Those Christians and their companions are to realise the meaning of the words of Jesus, *"This sickness will end not in death but in God's glory, and through it the Son of God will be glorified"* (John 11:4). Here I borrow words from Charles Newington. *"The Christian faith is not a fair-weather faith. It still functions in fair weather, but when the economy and the welfare system are humming along, God and the communion of faith seem less relevant. A crisis squeezes us more tightly than usual and what's in us will come out eventually. Some people are very self-assured. They are confident that they will rise to the occasion and triumph over adversity. Most of us are not so sure of what will come out of us if we are squeezed hard by financial instability, the demands of social isolation, or God-forbid that we or a loved one succumbed to the virus."*

Just as Jesus restored the life of Lazarus and a new beginning for his sisters, the COVID19 crisis is paving a path for new world. In a crisis like the one we have now, everyone realises the limitations of individualism and learns how interdependent we human beings are. The virus, not discriminating between the rich, the privileged, the celebrities, the powerful and the rest, makes everyone appreciate the interdependency as God's design for human beings. It is also helping us sort the perishable from the life-giving.

A crisis also makes humanity more creative. Businesses and the economy have already initiated some new thinking. The Education field is finding creative ways of schooling. Yes, the Crisis is not a waste. It becomes the birth pang of a new creation.

Jesus always stressed the importance of being there for others in a spiritual life. Prayer is not an exercise in itself, for making individuals better people, even though it will do that. It is coming close to God through Christ. It requires listening before speaking out our anxious thoughts. It requires surrendering to Jesus and taking up his calls. It requires an attitude like that of Thomas. When Jesus called his disciples to go with him to Bethany, they were afraid, thinking that Jews are waiting there to kill them. But Thomas showed what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus and said, *"Let us also go"* (John 11:16). A similar call of Christ has become real and has come closer to home. CatholicCare of Sydney is calling for volunteers to take food, medicine and such other provisions to the frail and lonely in the event of corona virus spreading and making many sick. Sister Cecilia Joseph, OP, from the parish convent, has agreed to coordinate the parish team who will be part of the Archdiocesan team. Anyone volunteering is invited to leave contact details with the parish office.

When this deadly crisis period is over we will look at our families, friends and neighbours with a deeper appreciation of God's goodness to us all. Our fellowship will be strengthened to subdue self-interests. We will be more respectful to those who do not share the same status as ours. We will be resuscitated like Lazarus in John Chapter 11. I invite you this weekend to read John 11:1-45 and understand Christ's message for you in this time of gloom.

Gospel

Jn 11:1-45



There was a man named Lazarus who lived in the village of Bethany with the two sisters, Mary and Martha, and he was ill. – It was the same Mary, the sister of the sick man Lazarus, who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair. The sisters sent

this message to Jesus, ‘Lord, the man you love is ill.’ On receiving the message, Jesus said, ‘This sickness will end not in death but in God’s glory, and through it the Son of God will be glorified.’

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when he heard that Lazarus was ill he stayed where he was for two more days before saying to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judaea.’ The disciples said, ‘Rabbi, it is not long since the Jews wanted to stone you; are you going back again?’ Jesus replied:

‘Are there not twelve hours in the day?
A man can walk in the daytime without stumbling
because he has the light of this world to see by;
but if he walks at night he stumbles,
because there is no light to guide him.’

He said that and then added, ‘Our friend Lazarus is resting, I am going to wake him.’ The disciples said to him, ‘Lord, if he is able to rest he is sure to get better.’ The phrase Jesus used referred to the death of Lazarus, but they thought that by ‘rest’ he meant ‘sleep’, so Jesus put it plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead; and for your sake I am glad I was not there because now you will believe. But let us go to him.’ Then Thomas – known as the Twin – said to the other disciples, ‘Let us go too, and die with him.’

On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to sympathise with them over their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus had come she went to meet him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, ‘If you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you.’ ‘Your brother’ said Jesus to her ‘will rise again.’ Martha said, ‘I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said:

‘I am the resurrection and the life.
If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he
will live,
and whoever lives and believes in me
will never die.
Do you believe this?’

‘Yes, Lord,’ she said ‘I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.’

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in a low voice, ‘The Master is here and wants to see you.’ Hearing this, Mary got up quickly and went to him. Jesus had not yet come into the village; he was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were in the house sympathising with Mary saw her get up so quickly and go out, they followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Mary went to Jesus, and as soon as she saw him she threw herself at his feet, saying, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ At the sight of her tears, and those of the Jews who followed her, Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart, ‘Where have you put him?’ They said, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus wept; and the Jews said, ‘See how much he loved him!’ But there were some who remarked, ‘He opened the eyes of the blind man, could he not have prevented this man’s death?’ Still sighing, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, ‘Take the stone away.’ Martha said to him, ‘Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day.’ Jesus replied, ‘Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?’ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said:

‘Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer.
I knew indeed that you always hear me,
but I speak
for the sake of all these who stand round me,
so that they may believe it was you who sent me.’

When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, here! Come out!’ The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bands of stuff and a cloth round his face. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, let him go free.’

Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what he did believed in him.

REFLECTIONS ON JOHN 11:1-45

Scriptural context – Jesus wept

'Jesus wept' is the shortest verse in the New Testament. Just two little words carry a world of emotion and speak volumes about Jesus. Pope Leo I used this verse to highlight the two natures of Jesus, pointing out that in his humanity, Jesus wept for the death of his friend, but in his divinity Jesus raised Lazarus to life. Lazarus and his sisters were close friends of Jesus and Jesus is clearly emotional about the death and its effect on Martha and Mary. That Jesus is about to restore Lazarus to life does not deny the grief and mourning at Lazarus' death.

Living the Gospel – Unbind him, let him go free

To see a man bound up for burial suddenly come walking from his tomb must have been an unnerving experience to say the least. However, Jesus calmly commands the astonished onlookers to 'unbind him, let him go free'. These words speak to us today as we come to the end of the Lenten season and approach the celebration of Easter. What are the things that 'bind' us? From what do we need to be released so that we may 'go free'? Are they bindings placed by ourselves or others? What will it take to be unbound?

Gospel Focus – Death for Life

The gospel writer paints the picture that Jesus is fully conscious of the implications of his return to Judea. As the events of the Passion unfold through this gospel, the reader has a very clear impression in their mind that if Jesus had not come to Judea; had not raised Lazarus; then he would not have been arrested and crucified. The reader is also drawn into the revelation that the sacrifice of Jesus was not solely for Lazarus but rather for all humanity. This realisation leads the reader to the ultimate humbling conclusion that if the sacrifice of Jesus was for people then the reader themselves is also the recipient of that sacrifice.

Keep the coming feast of the Lord through deeds, not words

From an Easter letter by Saint Athanasius (4th Century)

The Word who became all things for us is close to us, our Lord Jesus Christ who promises to remain with us always. He cries out, saying: "See, I am with you all the days of this age." He is himself the shepherd, the high priest, the way and the door, and has become all things at once for us. In the same way, he has come among us as our feast and holy day as well. The blessed Apostle says of him who was awaited: "Christ has been sacrificed as our Passover." It was Christ who shed his light on the psalmist as he prayed: "You are my joy, deliver me from those surrounding me." True joy, genuine festival, means the casting out of wickedness. To achieve this one must live a life of perfect goodness and, in the serenity of the fear of God, practise contemplation in one's heart.

This was the way of the saints, who in their lifetime and at every stage of life rejoiced as at a feast. Blessed David, for example, not once but seven times rose at night to win God's favour through prayer. The great Moses was full of joy as he sang God's praises in hymns of victory for the defeat of Pharaoh and the oppressors of the Hebrew people. Others had hearts filled always with gladness as they performed their sacred duty of worship, like the great Samuel and the blessed Elijah. Because of their holy lives they gained freedom, and now keep festival in heaven. They rejoice after their pilgrimage in shadows, and now distinguish the reality from the promise.

When we celebrate the feast in our own day, what path are we to take? As we draw near to this feast, who is to be our guide? Beloved, it must be none other than the one whom you will address with me as our Lord Jesus Christ. He says: "I am the way." As blessed John tells us: it is Christ "who takes away the sin of the world." It is he who purifies our souls, as the prophet Jeremiah says: "Stand upon the ways; look and see which is the good path, and you will find in it the way of amendment for your souls."

In former times the blood of goats and the ashes of a calf were sprinkled on those who were unclean, but they were able to purify only the body. Now through the grace of God's Word everyone is made abundantly clean. If we follow Christ closely we shall be allowed, even on this earth, to stand as it were on the threshold of the heavenly Jerusalem, and enjoy the contemplation of that everlasting feast, like the blessed apostles, who in following the Saviour as their leader, showed, and still show, the way to obtain the same gift from God. They said: "See, we have left all things and followed you." We too follow the Lord, and we keep his feast by deeds rather than by words.

Online Resources for Daily Mass & Prayer & Corona Virus Updates

- <https://shalomworld.org/specialevent/daily-mass> (Vatican Mass)
- <http://bit.ly/MassOnDemand> (Sydney Mass at St Francis Xavier Lavender Bay, Sydney)
- <https://www.stmaryscathedral.org.au/> (Mass Live Stream at St Mary's Cathedral)
- <https://www.facebook.com/anthonyfisherop/videos/2879218758821564/> (Lord's Prayer at midday for an end to the COVID-19 pandemic with His Grace Archbishop Anthony Fisher)
- <https://www.sydneycatholic.org/coronavirus-updates/> (Coronavirus Updates)
- <https://www.ourcatholicprayers.com/spiritual-communion.html> (Spiritual Communion)

INTENTIONS for Fr Thomas to include in his Private Mass

Sick: Joyce McDonald, Sr Tomsy

Recently Deceased: Fr Ray Farrell, Monica Smith, Anka Broz, Cenon Alinson, Herbert Vogel

Deceased: Fr Mark Spora, Anavea & Pakalesio, Petelo F Sili, Malia Selek, Makalita Pongi, Alan Ramsay, James Ong, Charlie Portelli, Carmen Portelli, Betty Portelli, Bert Portelli, Tony Spiteri, Carmen Spiteri, George Spiteri, Kath Coyne, Mamerto Bolonia Sr, Fatima Bolonia, Gloria Bolonia, Astrid Bolonia, Marylou Geronca, Winnie Guillena, Holy Souls in Purgatory

Deceased Members and Friends of: O'Dwyer & Erwin Families, Duong Family, Amores Families, Florendo Families, Domingo Families

Other Intentions: Rima Nakhle, Tony Rahme

Contact Parish office to include your intentions in the Mass by Fr Thomas

Fr Ray Farrell

It is with great sadness that I advise of the death of Fr Ray Farrell, at early hours of Friday, 27 March. He was the Parish Priest of St John of God, Auburn. He was in palliative care at St Joseph Hospital for some weeks. May the soul of Fr Ray rest in peace.



Monica Smith

Monica passed away yesterday morning, Thursday 26 March. She was a long time and much involved parishioner. May she rest in peace.

Suspended Ministries & Events

Following the Archbishops' directives and Fr Thomas' careful consideration to protect the well-being of our volunteers and parishioners during this epidemic, the following have been temporarily suspended:

Ministries:

Choir | Greeters | Hospitality | Hospital Visitation Saturday | Hospital Communion Sunday | Communion to Homes & Nursing Home | Children's Liturgy | Rosary Statue

Any sick person requiring prayers, anointing or communion, please contact Fr Thomas. He will try to accommodate your request.

Events:

First Holy Communion Classes and RCIA

Miscellaneous:

Hall Bookings - all bookings from now until end of July have been cancelled. We are not accepting any bookings until further notice.

COVID19 HELP TEAM

In this time of pandemic, caring for the frail and the elderly, especially those who are isolated, is challenging. CatholicCare is working to roll out a volunteer program to help the needy access groceries, cooked meals, medicine and other necessities at this difficult time. Sister Cecilia Joseph OP, from the parish convent has volunteered to coordinate the team from the parish end. She will liaise with CatholicCare and the parish volunteers. Some parishioners already have expressed their willingness to join the team. If you are willing to volunteer, please email the parish office with your name and contact detail. CatholicCare also has a dedicated phone service, CCareline – Phone 13 18 19 for the needy to contact.



Let's Go Further, Together. You can donate by visiting www.caritas.org.au/projectcompassion or phoning 1800 024 413.